



2005 Association for Rescue at Sea Awards

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On October 4, 2005, in Washington, D.C., the Association for Rescue at Sea (AFRAS) presented the AFRAS Gold Medal, three AFRAS Silver Medals, and the Amver plaque for heroic rescues made in 2004. The award ceremony and reception was co-hosted by the Honorable Howard Coble, co-Chairman, U.S. Congressional Coast Guard Caucus.

Honorees included: the Gold Medal winner, U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer Gregory Gibbons, Aviation Maintenance Technician Third Class; the Silver Medal recipients, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliaries Richard J. Runde, Jay P. Croy, and his wife, Linda R. Croy; and the Amver plaque recipients, the captain and crew of the Carnival Cruise Ship *Holiday*.

The Gold Medal

Gold Medal awardee AMT3 Gibbons is stationed at Coast Guard Station Kodiak. In 2004 he was serving with a helicopter aviation detachment with USCG HH-65B

NR 6513 (Helo 6513) aboard the USCG Cutter *Alex Haley*. The cutter, along with two USCG HH-60J helicopters, had been working to rescue the crew of the *M/V Selendang Ayu*, a 738-foot freighter, hopelessly adrift in very heavy weather in the Bering Sea. Already the two other helicopters had rescued 18 of the 26 persons onboard, but as the helicopters departed the scene to refuel, the master reported that the

ship was aground, taking on water rapidly, and all were in extreme peril.

The aviation detachment aboard the USCG Cutter *Alex Haley* was the only remaining rescue asset, but 25- to 30-foot seas and wind gusts as high as 45 knots made launch of a helicopter from the deck of the cutter highly problematic. Nevertheless, the pilot and aviation detachment decided to risk a launch, since others were in such peril aboard the freighter. During the *Alex Haley* helicopter's transit to the scene, USCG HH-60J NR 6020 (Helo 6020) returned from refueling. It was decided that, because



2005 AFRAS Gold Medalist AMT 3 Gregory Gibbons (center) introduces his pilot Lt. Tim Eason, without whom the rescue would not have been possible. At right, AFRAS Chairman Vice Adm. Roger Rufe, USCG (Ret.).



Before the crash. Coast Guard rescue helicopter 6020 is pictured transporting motor vessel *Selendang Ayu* crewmembers to the Coast Guard cutter *Alex Haley*. During these rescue efforts, Helo 6020 itself crashed.

it could take eight survivors at once, Helo 6020 would proceed with the rescue and *Alex Haley's* Helo 6513 would stand by to assist as necessary. But, after rescuing the first seven survivors, suddenly and without warning, a gigantic wave hit the bow of the *Selendang Ayu*, sending a huge wall of water into the air. Helo 6020 was engulfed in the water and went crashing into the sea, as the crew of Helo 6513 watched in horror.

The crew on the standby Helo 6513 from the cutter *Alex Haley* reacted



An over-flight photo, taken weeks after the rescues, shows the bow and stern sections of the 378-foot freighter *Selendang Ayu* near Skan Bay.

quickly. Petty Officer Gibbons rigged the rescue basket for hoisting, while the pilot, Lt. Tim Eason, moved the helicopter into position from a 150-foot hover, to avoid additional waves.

Throughout the rescue operation, AMT3 Gibbons communicated to the pilot precisely where the helicopter needed to be positioned. The Coast Guard crew was able to position the rescue basket within arm's length of the survivors, including a severely hypothermic, unresponsive member of the ship's crew. All of the observable persons—including the pilot, copilot, and flight mechanic of Helo 6020 were safely hoisted aboard—but the ship's master and the rescue swimmer from Helo 6020 were still on the ship, and six other members of the ship's crew could not be located. Helo 6513 did not carry a rescue swimmer, so the rescue basket was the only hoist means available and Petty Officer Gibbons played a critical role in this whole operation.

After breaking off to refuel at Dutch Harbor, Helo 6513 managed to return through mountainous terrain and very heavy weather to find the *Selendang Ayu*, now broken in two and covered in heavy fuel oil. The vessel master and the Coast Guard rescue swimmer remained on the unlit, powerless bow section. Hoisting at 200 feet through heavy snow that sometimes reduced visibility to zero, the crew of Helo 6513 persisted and eventually retrieved both the master and the swimmer. With both survivors in good health, the crew continued to search for additional survivors until low fuel dictated they depart the scene.

Thanks to the work of the crew of Helo 6513 and Petty Officer Gibbons' skillful and courageous performance as a flight mechanic, six lives were saved, including the four from the downed NR 6020.

The Silver Medal

USCG Auxiliarist Jay P. Croy, coxswain; his wife, Linda R. Croy; and crewmember Richard J. Runde were onboard a

USCG Auxiliary Facility—a 20-foot Grady White with cuddy cabin and inboard/outboard engine—performing patrol at the 33rd Annual Leech Lake Regatta in Walker, Minn., in August 2004. Leech Lake is a 460-square mile lake, which is known for unpredictable weather, including strong winds and high seas. On Leech Lake, as in many other large U.S. lakes, there is no Coast Guard presence, other than the USCG Auxiliary.

On the second day of the regatta, there were 10- to 15-knot winds and three-foot seas. The local Auxiliary Patrol Commander decided to deploy his two facilities near Pelican Island, at the farthest end of the race course, where they could rapidly respond to any crisis. Conditions worsened during the race, and, by the time the last participant had rounded the race buoy off Pelican Island, the winds were 15 to 20 knots with gusts as high as 35 knots. The two USCG Auxiliary Facilities began their slow trek back to base, following the regatta participants in, but noted that one of



From left, Silver Medalists Jay P. Croy and Linda Croy, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary; Vice Adm. Terry Cross, U.S. Coast Guard; and Silver Medalist Richard J. Runde, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

the sailboats had veered away from the course. Coxswain Croy brought his facility alongside the 25-foot scow *Wind Dancer* to find the crew (only two of whom were wearing life jackets) to be suffering from hypothermia, due to the rigors of racing in 57-degree F weather in such heavy winds and seas.

Coxswain Croy decided to take the sailboat in tow, despite the walls of water coming over his bow and conditions worse than he had ever encountered in his 20 years of expe-



Captain Leonardo Francolla (right), Carnival Cruise Lines, accepts the AMVER plaque from AFRAS Chairman, Vice Adm. Roger Rufe, USCG (Ret.).

rience as an Auxiliarist. The problem was to maneuver close enough to pass a line to the exhausted *Wind Dancer* crew. Coxswain Croy was able to make a successful pass on the first try, and crewmembers Runde and Linda Croy floated a survival pack of extra life jackets and a thermal blanket back to the *Wind Dancer*.

As coxswain Croy worked to keep the bow of his facility into the waves and to maintain a proper tow, his crewmembers kept up a steady conversation over the radio to reassure the *Wind Dancer* sailors. The 3.5-mile tow to the nearest marina took one hour and fifteen minutes, due to high winds and four- to six-foot seas. Once into calmer waters, the two hypothermic sailors were transferred to the cuddy of the Auxiliary facility and given dry clothing and anti-exposure coveralls.

The Auxiliary crew attended to the crew of the *Wind Dancer* throughout the rescue, until the sailors were turned over to emergency medical personnel at Leech Lake Marina. The skillful response of these three volunteers is most heartily commended and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary.

The Amver Award

On the night of August 21, 2004, the Carnival Cruise Ship *Holiday* was steaming through the Yucatan Straits in the Gulf of Mexico when two crewmembers came to the bridge to report that they thought they had heard a cry for help while standing on a weather deck. The bridge conning officer immediately instituted man overboard (MOB) procedures, stopped the ship, and called the captain to the bridge. The captain then reversed course and ran back down the global positioning system track to the MOB position shown on the screen.

The ship's crew and passengers were mustered, but no one was reported missing. The ship continued to search the dark waters for anyone who may have been lost from another vessel. About 45 minutes later, two persons were located off the port side of the ship and brought on board. They reported that there were three additional persons in the water. The *Holiday's* lifeboat continued to search for several more hours and located and recovered the three additional survivors. Of the last three recovered, one was a 10-year-old boy and another was his 39-year-old father, who was not wearing a life jacket but was clinging to a piece of wood. The five survivors were from a Mexican fishing boat and, other than being slightly hypothermic, were in good shape.

This rescue was conducted very professionally and represents one of the greatest traditions of the sea—a willingness to come to the aid of others in distress. Five very lucky fishermen are alive today because the captain was ready to stop his ship and carry out a 3.5-hour diversion from course to conduct search and rescue operations, with the help of his crew.

The Association for Rescue at Sea is a non-profit foundation with charitable status, which supports services concerned with saving lives at sea. The Gold Medal presentation was established in 1982, and the medal is presented annually to an enlisted member of the U.S. Coast Guard for an act of extraordinary bravery during a rescue at sea.

AFRAS established the Silver Medal in 2000, and it is presented when a Coast Guard Auxiliarist performs a rescue under the same criteria as that for an enlisted Coast Guard person. Silver denotes the uniform markings of a CG Auxiliarist as opposed to the gold of the Coast Guard.

The AFRAS Amver award was established in 1996 to recognize the contribution of mariners in ships at sea to the safety of their fellow mariners. Nominations for all awards are made by the U.S. Coast Guard's Search and Rescue Division.